

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

* * * * *

Investigation of:

*

*

METRO-NORTH RAILROAD FATAL TRAIN

*

CRASH, VALHALLA, NEW YORK

*

Docket No.: HWY-15-MH-005

FEBRUARY 3, 2015

*

*

* * * * *

Interview of: TOMMY COOPER

Metro-North Railroad
North White Plains, New York

Friday,
February 6, 2015

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: DAVID BUCHER
Railroad Accident Investigator

APPEARANCES:

DAVID BUCHER, Railroad Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

BRUCE PARKIN, Safety Inspector, Region 1
Federal Railroad Administration

PATRICK VEDDER, Inspector, Region 1
Federal Railroad Administration

KEVIN MAHONEY, Road Foreman
Metro-North Railroad

KIRK THOMAS
Association of Commuter Rail Employees

MICHAEL BELLUCCO
Association of Commuter Rail Employees

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>I N D E X</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Tommy Cooper:		
By Mr. Bucher		4
By Mr. Thomas		6
By Mr. Mahoney		7
By Mr. Parkin		7
By Mr. Bucher		9

I N T E R V I E W

(2:30 p.m.)

1
2
3 MR. BUCHER: This is Dave Bucher, Rail Accident
4 Investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board. This
5 is the interview of Metro-North engineer Tommy Cooper, engineer on
6 the Harlem Line. The interview is in relation to the accident
7 that occurred on February 3, 2015 at Valhalla, New York. The NTSB
8 accident number is HWY-15-MH-005.

9 To my left I have?

10 MR. THOMAS: Kirk Thomas, K-i-r-k, T-h-o-m-a-s, ACRE.

11 MR. MAHONEY: Kevin Mahoney, K-e-v-i-n, M-a-h-o-n-e-y,
12 road foreman.

13 MR. COOPER: Tommy Cooper, T-o-m-m-y, C-o-o-p-e-r.

14 MR. VEDDER: Patrick Vedder, P-a-t-r-i-c-k, V-e-d-d-e-r.
15 FRA inspector, Region 1.

16 MR. PARKIN: Bruce Parkin, B-r-u-c-e, P-a-r-k-i-n.
17 Federal Railroad Administration, safety inspector, Region 1.

INTERVIEW OF TOMMY COOPER

18
19 BY MR. BUCHER:

20 Q. Okay, Mr. Cooper, could you give us your hire date and
21 your -- you know, a little bit about your job experience?

22 A. Yes, sir. My original hiring date is -- for engine
23 service, is October 11, 1978, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

24 Q. Okay. Okay, and could you give us your first
25 certification date here at Metro-North?

1 A. That would be 9/3/1980.

2 Q. Okay. And how long have you been operating on the
3 Harlem Line, in particular, through the accident area? Just
4 approximately.

5 A. On a steady basis from 1983 to present.

6 Q. Okay, could you just relate to us your experience
7 operating across the Commerce Street crossing?

8 A. Yes, the Commerce Street crossing is one of many on the
9 Harlem Division. Each crossing, we take extra precaution
10 approaching and through each crossing.

11 Q. Okay. And how many times do you operate over the Harlem
12 Line, daily or --

13 A. Yes, I operate two trains daily over the Commerce Street
14 crossing. That would be Train 606 southbound and Train 615
15 northbound through Commerce Street.

16 Q. Okay. Have you had any experience with incidents at
17 Commerce Street or on any of the other local crossings there?

18 A. Nothing irregular at Commerce Street or any other
19 crossings or that would be reported to the rail traffic
20 controller.

21 Q. Okay. Have you operated on both 1 and 2 track through
22 the area?

23 A. Yes, I have.

24 Q. Is it uncommon to operate on 2 track as opposed to
25 number 1? Or is it -- either direction normal? I mean, it can be

1 either during --

2 A. It can be either direction. Track 1 northbound is more
3 likely.

4 Q. Okay. Just a couple questions about your experience at
5 Commerce Street in particular. In your own words, you know, how
6 do you -- what kind of traffic do you see at the crossing
7 normally?

8 A. It can vary. There can be cars waiting at the gates;
9 there may not be.

10 Q. Okay. And what times do you pass through Commerce
11 Street on both of your runs?

12 A. Approximately 5:55 a.m. on Train 606 and approximately
13 10:05 a.m. on Train 615.

14 MR. BUCHER: Okay. Okay, that's all I have at the
15 moment. I will pass it off to Kirk.

16 BY MR. THOMAS:

17 Q. I have two questions. You just -- you mentioned the
18 time. So you get a -- in your words, then, you get a good look at
19 that crossing at two different time periods, per se, as far as the
20 outside and --

21 A. Approximately 4 hours.

22 Q. Four hours?

23 A. Difference in time.

24 Q. Okay. And one quick question. You said extra
25 precautions there. So you're saying that engineers like yourself

1 take extra precautions through that particular area between
2 Commerce and that particular crossing area?

3 A. In my opinion, yes. Road crossings you're not only
4 looking down the tracks, you're also -- your vision -- your
5 peripheral vision comes into play, left and right, as well.

6 MR. THOMAS: All right, that's it. That's all I got,
7 thanks.

8 BY MR. MAHONEY:

9 Q. Kevin Mahoney, road foreman. Tom, this is more of
10 something I'm looking for your opinion. From North White Plains
11 all the way to Brewster, is there any crossings that you in your
12 opinion consider a dangerous crossing for an engineer to go by?

13 A. I would answer no. Each crossing there may be people
14 walking about or cars about because it is a road crossing. If I
15 had felt those were dangerous, I would have reported them.

16 Q. Is there any particular crossing that you feel uneasy
17 about going up north or heading south from Brewster -- southeast
18 to North White Plains?

19 A. I would say no.

20 MR. MAHONEY: Okay, very good.

21 BY MR. PARKIN:

22 Q. Bruce Parkin, FRA. Tom, a couple of questions. You
23 mentioned operating over Commerce Street. Do you operate over
24 that crossing the same way generally as you operate over other
25 crossings, you know, with caution and, you know, peripheral vision

1 and watching?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Okay. And presently you operate over there during early
4 a.m. hours. Have you operated that line in the evening when it's
5 dark?

6 A. Yes, I have.

7 Q. And going northbound on tracks 1 or 2 over the Commerce
8 Street crossing, do you take any exceptions to the condition of
9 the crossing, your view of what you can see at that crossing when
10 you're approaching it?

11 A. I take no exceptions at the Commerce Street crossing.

12 Q. Okay. And in all the years that you've been operating
13 over the Harlem Line have you taken any exception -- by that I
14 mean have you noticed any malfunction of the crossing apparatus,
15 during your time as an engineer?

16 A. Yes. There can be malfunctions with the road crossings,
17 and they can vary. Sometimes people run through the gates and
18 break the gates. It's possible that a gate may stay down, and
19 that would be reported to the maintainers. There can be
20 electrical issues, but those would be immediately reported and
21 fixed as soon as possible.

22 Q. Okay. Follow-up question to that. Have you passed any
23 of those locations that you just talked about where the gates have
24 been up and the apparatus not working? They were in the up
25 position while you passed through?

1 A. No.

2 MR. PARKIN: Okay, thank you very much. No other
3 questions.

4 BY MR. BUCHER:

5 Q. All right, and Tom, one question about the crew
6 staffing. In your recent runs, have you operated with a full
7 crew?

8 A. I have operated with a full crew.

9 MR. BUCHER: I have no more right now.

10 MR. THOMAS: I'm good.

11 MR. MAHONEY: I'm fine.

12 MR. PARKIN: No questions.

13 MR. BUCHER: Okay, this concludes the interview of
14 Mr. Tommy Cooper.

15 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: METRO-NORTH RAILROAD FATAL TRAIN
CRASH, VALHALLA, NEW YORK
FEBRUARY 3, 2015
Interview of Tommy Cooper

DOCKET NUMBER: HWY-15-MH-005

PLACE: North White Plains, New York

DATE: February 6, 2015

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.

Keith J. Maurer
Transcriber